

CORONAVIRUS

Ecuador builds emergency cemeteries amid rising deaths, coronavirus cases

“At the cemetery, they will be buried person by person, without cost to the families,” says the government’s coordinator handling the country’s coronavirus deaths.



People wait next to a coffin in a pick-up truck lined up outside of a cemetery as Ecuador’s government announced on Thursday it was building a “special camp” in Guayaquil for coronavirus disease (COVID-19) victims, in Guayaquil, Ecuador, on April 2, 2020. Vicente Gabor del Pino / Reuters

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By Reuters

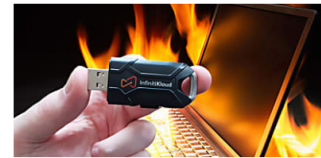
GUAYAQUIL, Ecuador – Ecuador’s government is preparing an emergency burial ground on land donated by a private cemetery in Guayaquil, the country’s largest city, to address a shortage of burial plots as the novel coronavirus hits the Andean country hard.

As of Tuesday, the country had 3,995 confirmed cases of the coronavirus and 220 deaths, with 182 more deaths suspected of being linked to the virus. The outbreak has sparked a shortage of wooden coffins, prompting some people to bury their relatives in cardboard boxes donated by cemeteries.

Large lines of cars carrying coffins waited outside private cemeteries across the city this week, as families waited for hours for a chance to bury their deceased relatives. The outbreak has overwhelmed hospitals and emergency services, with some families keeping dead bodies in their homes for days.

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The government, which last week began storing the bodies of coronavirus victims in giant refrigerated containers until graves were prepared, is aiming to bury some 100 people a day at the cemetery in northern Guayaquil, which has the capacity for some 2,000 plots.

Jorge Wated, who is coordinating the government's response to the handling of the dead, said the government was conducting burials itself and would publish a guide on the internet to ensure relatives knew where their loved ones were buried.

"At the cemetery, they will be buried person by person, without cost to the families," Wated said.

The city of Guayaquil also said it would prepare two public cemeteries with the capacity to handle some 12,000 plots.

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President Lenin Moreno said last week that some 3,500 people could die from the coronavirus in Guayas province, home to 68% of the country's cases and where Guayaquil is located.

Among the dead so far have been seven nurses, according to the Guayas College of Nurses, which added that some 147 nurses had been infected and 120 had resigned for fear of contagion.

"Each day, the number of staff is falling," said Lilia Triana, the organization's president.

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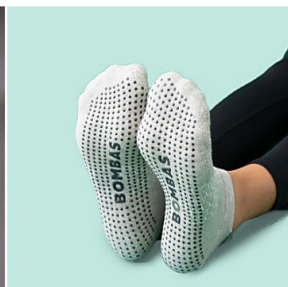
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